

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3950

To amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to authorize a State veterans assistance program, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 16, 2021

Ms. SCANLON (for herself and Mr. FITZPATRICK) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and in addition to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to authorize a State veterans assistance program, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Medical
5 Legal Partnerships Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Medical-Legal Partnerships (hereinafter re-
2 ferred to as MLPs) are holistic care models that in-
3 tegrate legal expertise and services into health care
4 settings or delivery systems to address underpinning
5 social and legal needs that negatively affect the
6 health outcomes of veterans and their families.

7 (2) MLPs build upon the traditional legal clinic
8 model by leveraging the unique, historical collabora-
9 tions between legal services organizations and med-
10 ical providers.

11 (3) Among other things, MLPs screen for, and
12 then aim to resolve legal issues veterans present,
13 that may include income security issues, unsafe
14 housing, impending evictions, family law matters,
15 benefit concerns, elder abuse, and guardianship
16 issues. Especially during the COVID–19 pandemic,
17 these needs were also shown to have direct implica-
18 tion on population health and the stability of our
19 economy.

20 (4) In addition to providing direct legal serv-
21 ices, MLPs help to improve quality and increase
22 value in health care delivery systems by engaging in
23 activities such as trainings for clinical teams and
24 helping health care providers optimize their services.

1 (5) MLPs have experienced steady growth and
2 reach since they were first developed in the mid-
3 1990s. In 2020 alone, some 450 MLPs in 49 States
4 helped more than 75,000 individuals resolve health-
5 harming legal needs. In recent years, MLPs have
6 flourished as effective models of care for veterans.

7 (6) Veterans are disproportionately at higher
8 risk for health problems, many of which are exacer-
9 bated by unmet social and legal needs. The percent-
10 age of veterans who have at least one disability is
11 double that of non-veterans, and 41 percent of vet-
12 erans have mental health conditions such as depres-
13 sion, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress
14 disorder (PTSD), and substance use disorder.

15 (7) Veterans are also at higher risk of having
16 legal issues, with one recent study finding an aver-
17 age of 1.5 legal issues per veteran. The most com-
18 mon civil legal needs included lack of access to VA
19 benefits, custodial issues, and housing issues like
20 eviction. Unmet legal needs are particularly harmful
21 to the more than 1.7 million veterans with family in-
22 comes below 125 percent of Federal poverty level. In
23 fact, a 2017 analysis found that civil legal problems
24 related to veterans' issues affected 13 percent of
25 low-income households with veterans or other mili-

1 tary personnel. For these households, the most com-
2 mon legal problems were in the areas of health or
3 health care, consumer finance issues, and employ-
4 ment.

5 (8) MLPs have proven to be a successful model
6 of addressing issues related to veteran care. One
7 study found that Veterans who received treatment at
8 MLPs showed significant mental health improve-
9 ment and even improvements in their housing and
10 income. Additionally, MLPs have been found to de-
11 crease readmission rates, length of inpatient hospital
12 stays, and visits to the emergency room.

13 (9) In Indiana, a 2018 grant from Indiana De-
14 partment of Veterans Affairs made possible an MLP
15 between Veteran Health Indiana and Indiana Legal
16 Services, Inc. and enabled veterans to access critical
17 civil legal services they may not otherwise have re-
18 ceived.

19 (10) A study assessed 4 MLPs in Connecticut
20 and New York and found that 75 percent of vet-
21 erans reached their legal goal in the one-year study
22 period, and in the first three months, those who re-
23 ceived full legal representation showed significant re-
24 ductions in symptoms of hostility, paranoia, psy-

1 chosis, generalized anxiety disorder, and posttrau-
 2 matic stress disorder.

3 (11) In 2017, a study designed to evaluate an
 4 MLP at UMass Memorial Hospital found that pa-
 5 tients referred by healthcare workers to Legal Aid
 6 commonly had other legal problems which the attor-
 7 neys could also help them address and 86 percent of
 8 clients said they would use the program again.

9 (12) Currently, the overwhelming majority of
 10 MLPs operate in Federal veteran’s facilities. States
 11 operate hundreds of veteran’s homes, treatment fa-
 12 cilities, and support programs that do not have
 13 MLPs or access to civil legal providers.

14 **SEC. 3. STATE VETERANS PILOT GRANT PROGRAM.**

15 Subpart 2 of part E of the Omnibus Crime Control
 16 and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10171) is amend-
 17 ed by inserting before chapter B the following new chap-
 18 ter:

19 **“CHAPTER A—STATE VETERANS JUSTICE**
 20 **ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

21 **“SEC. 511. SHORT TITLE.**

22 “This chapter may be cited as the ‘State Veterans
 23 Rehabilitation Program Act of 2021’ or the ‘SVets Act
 24 of 2021’.

1 **“SEC. 512. STATE VETERANS JUSTICE ASSISTANCE PRO-**
2 **GRAM.**

3 “(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—The Attorney General shall
4 make grants to eligible entities that have established or
5 have plans to create medical legal partnerships that aim
6 to reduce recidivism, promote rehabilitation and prevent
7 victimization or partner with a State and unit of local gov-
8 ernment veteran facilities, including nursing homes, as-
9 sisted living facilities, long-term care facilities, healthcare
10 facilities, and mental health clinics. The partnership shall
11 focus on veterans whose medical needs put them at risk
12 of recidivism or reoffending or becoming victim to a crime.

13 “(b) **PRIORITIZATION.**—The partnership shall
14 prioritize veterans who, because of an associated health
15 concern, are—

16 “(1) facing homelessness;

17 “(2) unemployment; or

18 “(3) or at risk of fraud, abuse, or other victim-
19 ization.

20 “(c) **GRANT PERIOD.**—A grant awarded under this
21 chapter shall be for a period of not more than 5 years.

22 “(d) **ELIGIBLE ENTITY.**—An entity is eligible for a
23 grant under this chapter if the entity is—

24 “(1) a unit of local government in partnership
25 with a nonprofit organization; or

1 “(2) a State in partnership with a nonprofit or-
2 ganization;
3 that operates or demonstrates a plan to operate a medical
4 legal partnership.

5 “(e) APPLICATION.—To receive a grant under this
6 chapter, an eligible entity shall submit an application to
7 the Attorney General at such time, in such manner, and
8 containing such information as the Attorney General may
9 require, including a detailed description of the need for
10 the grant and an account of the number of individuals the
11 eligible entity expects to benefit from the grant.

12 “(f) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—Not more than 5 per-
13 cent of a grant awarded under this chapter may be used
14 for costs incurred by the eligible entity to pay for adminis-
15 trative costs.

16 “(g) CONSTRUCTION COSTS.—Notwithstanding any
17 other provision of this Act, no funds provided under this
18 chapter may be used, directly or indirectly, for construc-
19 tion projects, other than new construction to accommodate
20 a medical legal partnership and may not constitute more
21 than 5 percent of a eligible entity’s grant award.

22 “(h) MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP DEFINED.—
23 The term ‘medical legal partnership’ means any State or
24 unit of local government and nonprofit that screens and
25 addresses legal issues for veterans, including legal issues

1 related to income security, housing, evictions, family law,
 2 public benefits, elder abuse, post-conviction relief, and
 3 guardianship.

4 **“SEC. 513. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

5 “There is authorized to be appropriated \$6,500,000
 6 for each of fiscal years 2022 through 2027 to carry out
 7 this chapter.”.

8 **SEC. 4. STATE VETERANS PILOT JUSTICE ASSISTANCE PRO-**
 9 **GRAM.**

10 Section 3 of the Veteran Treatment Court Coordina-
 11 tion Act of 2019 (34 U.S.C. 10651a) is amended—

12 (1) by redesignating subsections (c) and (d) as
 13 subsections (d) and (e), respectively;

14 (2) by inserting the following new subsection:

15 “(c) PREFERENCE.—In awarding grants, the Attor-
 16 ney General may provide a grant selection preference to
 17 jurisdictions that provide a plan to work with Federal or
 18 State medical legal partnerships to reduce recidivism and
 19 promote rehabilitation.”; and

20 (3) by adding at the end the following new sub-
 21 section:

22 “(f) MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP DEFINED.—The
 23 term ‘medical legal partnership’ has the meaning given
 24 such term in section 512 of the Omnibus Crime Control
 25 and Safe Streets Act of 1968.”.

1 **SEC. 5. VA MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS.**

2 Section 6304(b) of title 38, United States Code, is
3 amended to read as follows:

4 “(b) MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS.—The Sec-
5 retary may establish and maintain medical legal partner-
6 ships to screen veterans for civil legal matters associated
7 with the provision of health care or other benefits provided
8 by the Department and facilitate the provision of no-cost
9 legal services at Department facilities.

10 “(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

11 “(1) MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP.—The
12 term ‘medical legal partnership’ means has the
13 meaning given such term in section 512 of the Om-
14 nibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968.

15 “(2) CIVIL LEGAL MATTERS.—The term ‘civil
16 legal matters’ means non-criminal legal matters, in-
17 cluding issues related to health care, housing, gov-
18 ernment benefits, employment, educational services,
19 family law, post-conviction relief, and trusts and es-
20 tates.”.

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